

*The
Empire Builder*

Lord Olivier



...garth stories. No. 1

THE EMPIRE BUILDER

By the Same Author

WHITE CAPITAL AND COLOURED LABOUR.
THE ANATOMY OF AFRICAN MISERY.

THE EMPIRE BUILDER

BY
LORD OLIVIER



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AFTER thirty years, I think, a personal story loses its copyright; and this one was told me quite that time ago. It had happened to me, a civilian, to be borne for a time on the books of a cruiser of Her Majesty's Navy. The dreadful spiritual pressure of ward-room life—the packed unintermittent reactions of a score of discordant masculine personalities cooped up at close quarters—the intolerable sweltering tropical nights in the airless low cabins over the steering-engine—the ever-recurrent sense of slight delirium maintained by the continuous functional processes and professional automatisms of that monstrous exfoliation of human enslavement that takes form as the British Navy—the minutious drill and routine and pre-

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scription and subordination that alone, by disarming personal contacts and frictions, make existence endurable—the whole, at times so despairingly, but always with such resolute secrecy and dissimulation, detested and loathed by all the living hearts of the men about me—these things had in a manner prepared me to accept and understand the preposterous tale, so insolently derisive of sober record, and partly, I think, made it possible for the First Lieutenant to tell it me.

For, when we had opportunity to go on shore for two idle days at the island of Santa Chiara, I found that I had come to understand why sailors appear more lovable when they move among the children of Earth than the men of any other profession. Because, in that long starvation the black, exclusive pride that clogs the heart's apprehension is purged: its eyes are opened: it learns an in-

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stinctive, unselfconscious sensitiveness to the lovable in whatever new person it meets: it appreciates, and not guardedly, and to appreciate is the infallible key: it is glad and enjoys, and joy is the infallible charm: it is grateful for good encountered, without distinction of source, and gratitude is the infallible solvent: it is prepared for understanding and insight and inspiration of unbelievable and imperceptible things: and by that grinding, crushing daily round of ironclad artificiality it is disciplined beyond loophole of escape into the certain apprehension of things that are real. And to know the real is the secret of mastery, but to find one's own reality recognised is to find a comrade: and the heart of the children of Earth goes out to such answerers.

Moreover, the limiting conventions and accepted illusions of shore-dwellers are foreign to the men of the sea, or, if

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ever valid, have fallen out of their governing consciousness in their ocean seclusion.

I myself had caught moments of something that had seemed like friendship in the company of the First Lieutenant commanding: a taciturn, dark-complexioned, lean-faced, clean-shaven man, with a driving temper, not beloved, nor ostensibly lovable; but believed in, and authoritative, because his orders seemed alive with a latent incandescence of purpose and knowledge behind them, impatient of explaining itself, but thrilling with suggestion of reason. He was obeyed. There was a difference in him, too, from all the other officers of the ward-room that made him the only possible intimate for me. The books in his cabin put me on to the track of it: but he went beyond his books. And yet we were so far from intimate, after all our proximity, that, when he volun-

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teered the proposal that we two should spend our shore holiday together, on a two days' excursion to the crater, it touched in me a spring of delighted response that filled me with a glow of astonishment.

We landed on the grilling quay, threaded the narrow stone-paved main street of the little town, each beslung with a canvas satchel holding provisions and such cosmetic requisites as we deemed indispensable, accompanied by a striding bare-footed guide and a boy with hammocks and blankets. We waded the shallow fording and plunged across the broiling shingle of the wide, empty river-bed, where the women were flogging and pounding their household linen upon the stones—turned inland and tramped upwards along the narrow mule-road that sidled and burrowed eastward into the valley, between the towering forest-capped

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buttresses of the gorge and the tumbling, foaming stream, whose clear green shallows and shifting bed of rolled and flattened boulders and pebbles of every size the rough track crossed and re-crossed as the scouring torrent drove it from one sheer cliff to another. Upward we marched till the gorge itself refused us further passage, closed abruptly in blocking precipices, some thousand feet high, over which in long successive leaps of columnar foam the river came thundering down. The mule-track doubled back from the threatening face and clambered in painful zigzags up the beetling wall on the left. The pathway was overarched with thick tangles of fine-leaved creeping bamboo: in the clefts of the purple rock great tufts and plumes of rose-backed pale shell-pink begonia blossom sprang in profusion from sheaves of slender, glossy, blood-red stems and

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cunningly harmonised decoration of chiselled bronze-green foliage. From below, through the sun-chequered tangle of leaf and trailer that clung to the precipices, the sparkle and sound of the torrent came flashing up to us.

We reached the upper level and edged on an easy road to rejoin the course of the river above the falls. Near the lip of the tableland, where the ground began to shelve with a moderate slope towards the cataracts, we came to a clearing—rough pasture with a few goats and cows, a patch of sugar-cane, cassava and Indian corn with ground-provisions, the ruins of good masonry buildings, roofless, and a small thatched wattle dwelling still occupied. Here, our guide explained, we should have to pass the night.

The half-bred Spanish settler received us without enthusiasm or apparent ill-will. We bargained for a fowl; the

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blowsy, silent-footed wife, with the black-eyed, broad-faced, curly-headed troop of mute, observant children, would prepare a stew for supper. Meanwhile we two sat outside on a tree-trunk bench, looking westward over the pasture and down between the forest-clad bluffs of the gorge to the gleaming sea. Right and left and encompassing us behind, the velvety dark green mountain slopes ascended, fold beyond fold, to escarpments and towering peaks, the outline everywhere soft with the mossy texture of virgin forest, astonishingly stained, in the sunset, with films of thin transparent scarlet tinting, through which the deep cool greens and olives, the violet and lake of the distances, the great woolly masses of vapour creeping up out of the sombre ravines, showed harmonised in a rapture of unobtrusive colour. In front the sea gleamed golden under long rafts of fire-edged cloud: the

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sun right opposite to us sank flaming into the water: the summits at our back were glowing still in his rays. The whispering rush of the river sounded persistently. The goats assembled quietly from the pasture and sauntered one by one to the ruined stables. The air was cool, aromatic with the distilled perfume of the forest. "*Los Dios,*" the Spaniard told us, was the name of the homestead: a mission station once. "LAVS DEO—" we deciphered that title, on a lintel-stone of the ruins, and understood.

We supped, smoked, slung our hammocks, and slept, and started next morning at daybreak towards the crater. A long, steep climb through narrow forest paths, deep greasy loam, with foothold only on tripping tree-roots and brittle reefs of shale, brought us up on to a mist-drenched ridge overlooking a ghastly hollow ringed round with blackened

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tree-trunks and sulphur-stunted bush. We struggled in pouring rain down slopes of coarse, malignant razor-grass into sloughs of treacherous clay, through which hot springs and fetid jets of sulphuretted steam bubbled and wheezed. The crater was not in active eruption; had not been so for many years. We had soon seen enough of it, and set ourselves to clamber back up the slippery banks of clay and through the blood-thirsty razor-grass to the woodland region again.

Half suffocated, drenched to the skin, parboiled in the crater, and chilled in the driving fog of the windy ridge, we felt grateful for the steamy gloom of the forest track. We tramped back almost in silence down through that tangled solitude till we plunged into the lovely sunlight again at the fording of the river where it skirted the open ground of the mission clearing. And then, giving

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thanks, we stripped off our smeared and sodden garments, and stretched and rolled our bodies in the warm pebbly shallows of silken water, and were purged of our sweat and bruises and sulphurous stains, and having sent our guide for our night suits lay down there on the turf in the afternoon sunshine and slept till the goats began to move homewards again. And as we sat once more on the wooden bench in the kindling sunset and saw again the heavens and the earth grow full of the majesty of that golden glory, we suddenly were aware of Her Majesty's ship *Desolation*, Armoured Cruiser, lying at anchor under the sunset there in the bay. And the same word came to us both simultaneously: "It does not seem very relevant, all that, does it?" For we felt as though we had travelled very long and very far in those twenty-four hours, and had come, in a certain degree, to our

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own country. And it was after that that the First Lieutenant told me the story. He said: "Not if you look at it that way, it don't seem relevant—not to you or me, that is; it seems relevant as it is to plenty of fellows, those for whom it is meant to be taken seriously; and it is relevant and significant enough, if you can see it the other way round, for you and me, too." And he told me this story, from which I was to understand what he meant.

For there had been, he related, once upon a time, a young officer, a junior second lieutenant on a gunboat (old style—steam and sail). I cannot say how long ago it was; but at that time there were still unappropriated islands in the Pacific (unappropriated, that is, by any Great Power, and therefore belonging to nobody). And the gunboat came to touch at one of these uncivilised, unannexed, unprotected places,

and the Lieutenant went on shore. He met there a few white traders, other aliens of undefinable occupations, and one tall, dried-up, parchment-faced Presbyterian missionary, a masterful figure, with grizzly buff hair and a huge ropy beard that might have been bleaching white but for stains of tobacco-smoke and weather. The gentry and nobility of the island, thus represented, were hospitable to him according to their means; Scotch whisky flowed and poultry bled in his honour. But these refectious pall; he was glad when the missionary laid hold of him and carried him away to his house to tea: a pleasant house with a garden: and he stayed there to supper with the missionary's good wife and a string of freckled children. The missionary had an eldest daughter just growing up, an ivory-skinned Miranda with red-gold hair, and the Lieutenant saw her eyes like amber

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in the sunlight, and in the lamplight like a shadowed sea, and in the moonlight on the beach, when he said "Good-night," unfathomable; and it seemed to him at those times that he was admitted to an understanding of things arranged and appointed, very simple, and in no way disturbing, but infinite and inevitable and intelligible as Death (for Death was part of them). But when he went back to the ship, it seemed to him that he must be in love. And the ship weighed anchor and sailed, and did not revisit the place. Of the missionary's eldest daughter's impressions I can say nothing. The ship sailed away from that island and wandered intricately over the face of the ocean; and the Lieutenant found himself pondering very far-reachingly upon the ordering of the world. He had been in love before; once at least with a materialised outcome of some import-

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ance; but it had not been so ordered that in that instance he should be afflicted with any very distracting problem. He had, in fact, married upon it; an unthrifty if not culpably reckless proceeding; and how his wife was supported it is beyond my range to imagine. I feel no doubt they were exceedingly fond of each other. He certainly, I should be sure, was not one that would be looking for anyone else to fall in love with: melancholic he was and serious, taking things earnestly; not at all of the temperament of a flirt. This happened to him (however it is to be spoken of) nevertheless.

This experience, as I understood the tale that he told me, appeared to have brought a new region into his consciousness; and there grew in him a stronger and stronger conviction that there was something that he must and something that he could effect in relation to it:

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but after a while it began to grow less clear to him than he had, at first, imagined it must surely become, what this thing to be done might be. His assurance of the fact held its ground. I do not suppose his mortal heart was less deceitful or less desperately unscrupulous than those of the rest of us; but he settled to this one account of the matter and stuck to it; and if there were other troublous intrusions he did not acknowledge them, even, I think, to himself.

What worked, to his perception, within him was not the simple hunger of a lover for a woman he could not possess; his disciplined conscience would have struck him aghast at any suspicion of what he would have deemed disloyalty in himself to a wife that he loved. Rather, indeed, this experience seemed something additional and corroborative to his relation to her. In his

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consciousness it took two forms—by his own account—and it is not for me to speculate what variants were potential in them.

First, a constant, questing, blind, mother-brooding anxiety as to what might be the destiny of the girl—that vagary of nature and circumstance, the shining, chance-sown blossom unfolded there in that unheard-of, unvisited island—with no probability of release, no allowance of worthy companionship, no prospect of a tolerable mate. Such a fate, such a meaningless, unjustifiable waste. Not a selfish brooding. He certainly was conscious of no such jealousy as would have grudged the winning of her to any decent fellow that could have discovered and carried her off. A passionate demand only that Life should be good to her.

And, secondly (which was the real point of the story), he had in those few

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moments beheld that something that he never had seen before; and had learnt about himself things he had never before been aware of. And the things he had so learnt seemed quite positive, and relevant, importantly so, to the affairs of daily life—indeed to his own professional future. The apprehension explained itself. Nothing else could intelligibly do so. Nevertheless, as the tale of the months and the miles that divided him from the island increased, his perceptions of these deep matters and of their bearing grew dimmer, and their arrangement lost its order and intelligibility. And all that unknown in himself that had seemed to take form and be satisfied in the obviousness of that apprehended order began to be disquieted, and distrustful, as it were, and impatient, and even to lie in wait for him by night till intelligence should be drugged and disarmed, and then to

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awake and torment him, forestalling his early watch, with questions and searchings, and, finding the interpreting oracles fail, with desperate hints of revolt and foreshadowings of encroachment. And to escape from this overclouding it seemed to him more and more clearly imperative and altogether sufficient that he should just see the girl once again: a remedy plainly impossible. I have spoken of him as having fallen in love, and I speak so because, although by his account of it it did not work with him in quite a commonplace fashion, he spoke so himself. His condition had the essential diagnostic of insanity, in the matter of that imagined illumination, which challenged him to put it thus to the proof, or be darkened for ever. He needed to be reminded, to experience once more that direct perceptive assurance; and he desired nothing more. It was just

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the gnawing menace that, failing this, he should come to need more that disturbed him.

I cannot particularise the geography of the sequel; it would bring too close into range the identity of the persons concerned, and might thereby embarrass and disquiet some people still living; much solid history having, in fact, been the outcome.

The circumstances and antecedents of a junior lieutenant, impecunious, maintaining a wife and child in lodgings in Chelsea, a man under authority, serving his daily routine in successive commissions, are not in themselves essentially conducive to illusions of omnipotence. One might confidently assert that there are some things impossible to a man in such a position, and that one of them might be to get himself transported to a scarcely-known-of island a thousand miles from any-

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where. But part of what had seemed to happen to him was a taking into the confidence of the Creator, or, less personally, as it appeared to his feeling, of That whose willing ensures that Its will shall be done. And he seemed to himself to know that this particular thing could be and was to be done. He would have to go in a ship. He was a sailor; and where ships can go a seaman can manage to get; but this—to quit the Navy, and find himself a berth on one of the tramps that from time to time condescended to visit that insignificant little cinder-heap in an avoided ocean—this would not be playing the game. As the normally appointed evolutions of Her Majesty's Navy refused him opportunity, and as, indeed, any voyage having no other ostensible primary motive than the fancy of a man once more to behold a maid appeared to him out of the question, my Lieutenant of

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a gunboat soon to be out of commission found no course left open to him but to turn himself round and lay hands on the mighty wheels that steer the visible destinies of the world, to initiate, in effect, a process of tampering with the administration of the British Navy. It cost him a long campaign to do this (that imperative alert in his heart all the while); but he got his idea and stuck to it and followed it out doggedly. He specialised enthusiastically and determinedly on certain departments of study, and set himself unobtrusively and cautiously to lure his sympathetic Commander into an interest in his specialities. They touched the professional interests of the Service on the side of survey work, the study of currents and tides, and crept from the groping exploration of deep-sea bottoms to the theory of coral and volcanic land formations in these archipelagoes, from submarine zoology to the

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fauna and flora and human populations of the shore; to the islands, in fine, and their inhabitants as suitable objects for the cognisance of British commercial policy.

His Commander was a man well known inside the Admiralty, having credit with the Hydrographer's Department; and, with his help, by about two years later the Lieutenant's operations had prospered so far as to determine the destination of a surveying ship and to get himself placed on board of her. This vessel was to be engaged for three years on surveys that were not in fact designed to include precisely the waters of my friend's enchanted island, although on the map they might have appeared to range within touch of it. My Lieutenant was second officer in this tantalising commission; and in order to carry out what was laid upon him he found himself left with no

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alternative short of precipitating another part of his plan—no less than bringing about the annexation to the British Dominions of the whole of the group to which the island belonged. He had, I understood, been keeping in touch, by correspondence, all this time, with the masterful missionary, whose patriotic impulses he had fomented into active local intrigue, so that the move was prepared from both sides, suggested at home and ostensibly demanded on the part of the aborigines.

Annexation was determined upon at length. The order went forth; and the surveying ship was, on his well-conceived suggestion, detailed to reinforce the effect of the cruiser that took possession of the islands in Queen Victoria's name, with royal salutes and flags and parading of bluejackets and photographing of captains and cannibal kings. The Lieutenant was there. He

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recognised the missionary's family packed in the gallery of one big iron-roofed store overlooking the market-place as he marched with the procession to the flagstaff, and the bluejackets and marines swung up with the little saluting pieces. He was aware of the girl there; the source and efficient cause of this complex and world-embracing event. I do not think his pulse was a bit the quicker. This—this homecoming to her presence—was what had had to be, and it was. It stilled him. He looked no further. He went in due course to the house. He simply found exactly what he had come for, and as he had known those four years that he would find it. "We have often been talking of you," the mother told him. The ships were to stay two days.

Again the barbarous people showed him their kindness—more hospitable and pressing now than ever. The mis-

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sionary household organised a water excursion and picnic in his honour. The scanty handful of presentable female society was collected. The Lieutenant provided boats and midshipmen. He devoted himself to the children: the eldest daughter and he said little to one another after the first friendly greetings. All external things seemed subordinate, as he stood there at the goal of his four years' purpose, to the miracle of the accomplished will. The simple particular thing he had willed, the reasons why he had willed it, scarcely made themselves felt as of account in this strange enlightenment. He was, I fancy, much as a child might be that should have wandered by chance into the outer meadows of Heaven: what offered itself, unsought, to his apprehension sufficed, and more, to engross it: he felt no call or curiosity to look further, to explore for more poignant experience:

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no imagination of such as possible suggested itself: he was balanced in an emotionless contentment, which, if aware of itself, might have seemed as if poised not to miss, by unrest, any single passing delight of this happy mystery so naturally and gratuitously shed round him. And the ships lying at anchor there in the roadstead, and the authorities that had seemed to command them, and the liberty men making noisy holiday, after their kind, about the town, and the flicker of gaudy new bunting at the staffhead beyond the tree-tops, all seemed as the remote silhouette of Her Majesty's ship *Desolation* had suddenly seemed to us both in that setting of hazy gold: that buoyant illumination transfiguring us there on the mountain, as we rested where the Jesuit exiles had often rested, looking westward from that silent slanting meadow where nothing now remained

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of their labours or their aspirations, but enduring tradition only that they had praised God in that place. That was what had reminded him and moved him to tell me the story; and that was how it was I could partly understand and believe it.

And so, in that luminous calm, he had accepted what came to him; was at ease, pleasantly radiant, doubtless, for all; teased and was teased by clinging and clustering children; purred to the matrons; did not single out the one that had drawn him there; contentedly heard her chatter and laugh with his messmates and the middies. But suddenly, once, in the midst of that twittering group of girls and boys, disputing loudly some trifle where they sat or sprawled on the boulders of the torrent bed in the shade of the ferns and the creepers, she turned and appealed to his judgment. And

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the ivory of her face was bright with delicate colour, and her eyes were on his, and the universe transparent behind them, visibly, and, at its heart, himself. And after that, he said, he neither avoided nor sought her, for he saw that there was nothing more to be sought or avoided. Nevertheless, they were in each other's company, for the most part, going home, and in the evening afterwards; and he stayed late at the house, for his ship was to sail the next morning. And he, moving in ecstasy, and yet with a curiously alert perceptiveness of externals and ease of self-directing response, was very quiet and circumspect lest any word or breath should stir consciousness or quicken imagination to sow regret between them: it was not for any such superficiality that he had done what he had done to find her. And she was crystalline to him in her freedom from any shadow or sign of the possibility of such

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consciousness in her—so different from so many other sailors' lasses! It seemed to him that the crystal would have shattered in thunder and extinguished their world at a touch. At their parting (inevitably then they had found themselves alone in the hall-way together) she met his handclasp firmly and heartily; and just in that moment the surface of her aspect and all her impact upon him seemed to be changed: he saw her no longer as a half-impersonal mystery, but, now, a woman, with the granite of her race in her character; not a girl, but an independent being, his equal, endowed with purpose, defying mortal fate. And he thought (but at the moment, again, to him, it was knowledge) that she too had understood that event, and why it was he was there, and that in that meeting she, too, had come to herself. And then (for his boat was waiting for him at the jetty, and the rain was falling in sheets in the flashing

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and thundering night) he turned from her on the lighted verandah, sprang down the steps, and in a moment was soaked to the skin. His heart was shouting with joy; the seething down-pour lashed it to fresh exultation, baptised him into elemental infinities of deliverance. He raced, splashing and stumbling, unaware of his own limbs, through the darkness, guessing his road by the flashes that lit up the grey perpendicular curtains of streaming water enclosing him. On the jetty the sullen eye of the boat's lantern blackened the gloom. He tripped over the shank of an idle anchor that lay there, and fell against the gear of the derrick and streaked his wet white clothes with black winch grease, and bruised his shin and forearm. And he said, "But I was like a dove to those fellows, who had been sitting there for an hour baling the gig and damning me into every hell they could think of—like a dove!—but

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they jolly well knew they had got to look sweet and act civil; and sweet and civil they were by the time we came on board. Nothing mattered, you see. Nothing else could ever matter for me if that knock-out didn't: and I made them understand that nothing had to matter to them. And after that I knew how it was done, and what makes an officer."

It did not seem to matter, in fact, that Necessity, in the shape of Admiral's orders, rang down that curtain just then, rather than later, and that the surveying sloop weighed anchor at daybreak the following morning. The gross interpolations of mortal Time are of little account in a record of whose true text every syllable is significant in eternity.

This chapter seemed to have left him further than ever from any possible dream of relation to her or purpose between them of which he could have given account to mundane reason. The

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bar of the actual was rigid against them now: he knew, and did not suffer his heart to chafe at it. Moreover, that thundering rain-drench that had blotted her out from his sight had been to him, in a measure, both Lethe and Eunoë. In the months that followed, before he was altogether withdrawn from that region of the terraqueous globe, he realised that he was nearer than ever before to understanding the significance of these things. There was no longer any imperative with regard to her; no sense at all as before of necessity to see her again: whilst as to his inward assurance that this was not the end of it for them both he could not find that it had any reference at all to this temporal world; and as to any other he had no formulas. The illusion of holding unpaid-for scrip in a posthumous Paradise was not in his philosophy.

That semblance of desire then was gone: there remained from it only the

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knowledge that the willing it had maintained had been effectual, no longer a faith now—a record. He quite understood the conditions for the removal of mountains: the certainty had been prophetic, the apprehension of destined things not visible, not rationally to be regarded as possible: his will had brought this about, but his will made part of that Will whose willing is done, and granted, in this matter, consciousness of its aim. And the doubt and the anxiety were gone. All would be well with her. He saw this, because he had seen the accomplishment of that former purpose and knew what assurance and understanding it had brought for himself, when the moment came, in the gully, and because he had been shown that she, too, had been held in that same Hand, and that this event was also for her, and herself invulnerable. “It seemed,” he said, “as if I ought not to have needed to see her again in

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order to be sure of that about her: and yet I am glad I did need it: for the second time gave me my bearings. You understand? One might feel confident about a particular point: but when one has two, one knows one's bearings for certain, and can steer a course and be sure of it. I recognised then that what I had seen the first time was really that she and I, in the aspect in which I saw her, were beings that nothing earthly could possibly hurt. No evil had befallen her, certainly, and I don't think I had ever really feared it; although it was a mystery to me why, if she was not to suffer evil, she had been set and was kept there in the thick of so many abominations. But the second time I not only saw that again, in the same direct, indescribable way, but I saw it also, when I said good-bye to her, as anyone else might see it or judge it, when her face and all the shape of her looked like that—as her character, her

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own build and temper and grit, though I'd never a notion before she could look so, and somehow, for a moment, I didn't entirely like it. It challenged and shook me for a moment so almost intolerably. This was visible strength of character, and after all one could imagine of something stronger overcoming it: the other was something mobile, something intangible, not a thing one could think or speak of as having any resistance at all, and yet if one knew that was real one would be certain of everything. And seeing it that second time I knew that it was real: real in me and in her, and that knowledge stays with me. And that's why after that I always remembered her in my prayers, when they happened to come to me: I didn't before: though I have no doubt she had remembered me in hers. It's that sort of reality prayers have to do with."

"And what more did you do about it in the visible world?" I asked.

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“No more than I have been doing ever since. No, it wasn’t as you might think,” he went on. “Of course I had bad moments now and then: and if I had stayed there longer I can’t say how things would have gone: but that wasn’t ordered. You don’t suppose a thing like that is a matter of chance, do you?”

I shrugged.

“Well, it isn’t: that’s one of the things I learnt, and by learning it became my own master and other people’s. No: for the most part the fog kept off; didn’t even distantly threaten, as it used sometimes to threaten trouble before. When you’ve known what impossible things are possible, and have done them, you know also what very easy and everyday things are impossible: and they let you alone, and you them. There’s always clear weather at the back of life for me now, clear air and sun, like we had this afternoon when we woke, and a kind of

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reminiscence of music coming through it when things go well. And even if they don't seem to be going well, I know.

“At first, of course, it seemed too preposterous to suppose that was really how the whole world is run—as it is. Look at it this way. This business left her and me externally very much as we were. Not inwardly, in my case, but let that rest for the moment. But what it has done outwardly—that need of mine to see that girl again—has been to put a whole lot of money and ships into circulation, to set working a heap of new convictions and activities in the minds of all sorts of bosses, my skippers, the Hydrographer, My Lords, the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, the Germans, the French, the Yankees, the Missionary Societies, and the Kanakas, that would never have got there at all if I had not happened to land on that island that first afternoon, and if I had

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not got just that vision I did get, to start me scheming. And how many men alive would have got that vision, and taken it in just that way? You may think I imagine or exaggerate, but I don't. I was inside this thing for four years, and have seen it clear from the outside ever since, and I can trace every step of it. There was nothing else in it that made our bigwigs annex. I did that, or rather this thing in me did it. I couldn't have got back there otherwise, and I shouldn't have understood without that what it meant for me. The islands would have been French or German by this time, but for that. Our people didn't want to bother with it, and really there wasn't the ghost of any practical reason why they should. It's the damnedest hole."

"What became of Prospero's daughter?" I asked.

"Her family cleared out very soon after that, and went to New Zealand.

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But I had got that done: and the practical results go on breeding. I did not do it for the sake of the British Empire, or for the credit of the Navy, or for the niggers, or for the glory of God, or for any such second-hand clap-trap. I did it through something that carried me once for all outside of all such idols, a power that I can work with for its own sake, and that makes me the brilliant and promising officer that I am. I know my job, sure enough. It comes easy to me, and knowing one's job, no doubt, counts for a lot; but not for everything.

“That ship is the smartest ship in the squadron, and that's my job just now: that's known. I'm known as a man devoted to my profession, and I shall do well in it. And the Fleet is for England, and all of us for the Fleet! And the Fleet in action is devilry made divine; and the Fleet out of action is a parcel of make shift playthings, of

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whose inefficiency and futility every week brings its new demonstration. Futility and inefficiency, that is, for every purpose that a fleet in its imagined significance can serve for the good of a nation. But it isn't for those purposes that the Fleet exists at all. It exists, for one thing, to give the men that are devoted to that profession their bellyful. You catch a few of the old ones and start them talking about the interests of the Service, and what success and satisfaction they've had for their pains, and you'll see! It exists as a prison-house and a drill-room and a treadmill for the men that need that grinding, and as a plaything and an exercise of efficiency for those that can make light of it. It exists for the needs of the natures of the men of the whole nation in a degree, but more intimately and directly for the needs of those that man it. And consequently it grows and moves by the inner needs

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of men, and often enough by their fancies. And every man that believes in the Fleet believes in it because he has found it good for him; and those that hate it hate it because they don't know what is good for them and are sent into the Navy to learn. It manufactures men—whatever it may be that men have to be made for. And we all of us go through that mill: and some of us come through quicker than others, and those of us who know what we really want will find the Navy plastic enough to give it us: and that's as true of every pasty-faced youngster that snivels in his hammock forward of nights as it was of myself when I had to make that land-fall. You never know what it is that's moving a ship: but you can always be sure that it's not what the Admiralty suppose."

"You make my brain reel," I said. "I can't follow your theory out into details of orders."

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“No: of course you can’t,” he replied, “nor can I: we aren’t inside the works. But you and I both saw quite clearly this evening that the universe was for us, and the ship there a very trifling and subordinate particular of it: and the Jesuit here saw the same, and thanked God for it, no matter whether his mission prospered or not. He took his profession very much as I do mine: as everyone must that works in a system of discipline, and is to be something more than a cog. You saw that then, and you must have seen it before: one does get inside sometimes, as I did in those years in the Pacific: and then you see that what is true for yourself must necessarily be true for everyone else, and you can see it, sometimes, at work. And when you understand it about everyone you’ll know how to take hold of things in them that they are hardly aware of themselves: and they’ll follow you: and that’s discipline, and part of

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knowing one's job. And the fact that you can do that is part of the proof of what we have been saying."

It seemed to me that there might be something in it. I am convinced, at any rate, that the story he told me was, in all essentials, true. Troy's ruin and the founding of Rome and of her republic have been accounted for on somewhat kindred lines. But I was still unsatisfied.

"You did not tell me what became of Miranda," I pressed him.

"She had been keeping a school. After my first wife died I went out to look for her. But I did not find her. That was not what had been intended. I married her youngest sister. She understands."